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War Food Administration
Office of Marketing Services
Nutrition Programs Branch

Case History of a
Nutrition Committee Activity

COMMUNITY PLANNING FOR BETTER NUTRITION

Cincinnati, Ohio, platted at the cross-roads of the Ohio river in 1788, has been a metropolitan city for more than a hundred years. The rich lands of Ohio's back-country, and the economic system of the cotton planters to the south, early made of Cincinnati a brisk market place.

The first settlers, Scotch-Irish, began cutting down the wilderness around the new townsite. Settlers from other states, pushing towards the west, stopped and built homes for themselves in this new Ohio town then called Losantville, (meaning "town opposite the mouth of the Licking"). Germans, fleeing religious and political persecution in their native land, made Cincinnati their destination in the middle of the 19th century. And when a potato famine threatened to starve all Ireland in 1840, great numbers of Irish people migrated to Cincinnati. Soon the fame of Cincinnati as a "town where work could be had," spread all over Europe. Germans, Swiss, Belgians, Dutch, and people from almost every other European country found their way to Cincinnati. They brought with them their native skills and racial traditions, thereby helping to build the city of diversified industry which has spread far beyond its original river-basin area, and now covers the surrounding hills with homes, factories, churches, and schools.

Wartime found Cincinnati a city teeming with industrial production, its people busy in shops, factories, and offices. For even though Cincinnati is considered an industrial town, commerce has always been an important factor in the city's economy.

The 1940 census listed Cincinnati as a city of 455,610 people. The 1944 Market Guide of "Editor and Publisher" estimated the population at 838,070. And a 1944 business estimate of the Cincinnati trading area-market was \$500,-000,000.

A city of this size has a complex set of health problems to handle. Fortunately, some 26 years ago, all groups and agencies in Hamilton County concerned with health needs organized as a Public Health Federation, this organization still functions today as the Public Health Federation of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

Subdivision action groups, called Councils, were set up to handle specific programs. Membership on these Councils is made up of professional and lay persons who meet as individual groups on regular dates, usually once a month.

A Coordinating Committee, which consists of officers of the various councils, members at large, chairmen of councils, health commissioners, and official representatives of professions-medicine, dentistry, nursing, and pharmacy. This group also meets monthly to guide the current programs and prevent duplication of effort.

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The Federation, which acts as the over-all administrative and planning body, is made up of two representatives each from all public and private health agencies in Hamilton County. This group holds an annual meeting to receive the reports of the various councils, discuss the work in general, and to elect officers for the coming year.

This farsighted vision of the need to coordinate effort, through community team work and citizen participation, has served the problems of war-time well. When, after the President's National Nutrition Conference, Ohio set up State and local nutrition committees, the Public Health Federation of Cincinnati needed only to add a Nutrition Council to have a full-fledged nutrition committee ready for action not only in the city but in all of Hamilton County. The Nutrition Council membership is made up of specialists in nutrition, and physicians who work in close cooperation with the Academy of Medicine and the Health Departments of the City and County.

The primary objections of the Council are to educate all of the people in the basic principles of nutrition. To do this the Council has been carrying on its nutrition program on three fronts: The industrial front, the school front, and the home front.

The Industrial Front

After surveys showed that a high percentage of the working people did not have all of the foods essential to health, much attention has been given to the problems of nutrition in industry. Industrial nutrition kits were sent to 200 of the larger industrial establishments. Each packet contains 14 sample leaflets which could be ordered in quantity by the company.

Through a plan worked out with a bakery corporation, the services of a nutritionist were assigned to the Council's Nutrition in Industry Sub-Committee. With this full-time worker available, it was possible for the Subcommittee to carry through a demonstration program with the employees of a large machine company. A health education program was set up. In this program posters, leaflets, articles in the company's house organ, and other devices to catch the workers attention were used. Subsequent tray-checks of the workers food selections proved that a health education program could improve dietary habits.

Preliminary contacts with several other companies have been made, and the Council plans to approach other industries with this type of program. Changes will be made in these programs to fit the need of each plant.

THE SCHOOL FRONT

The wartime Food Institute sponsored by the Council and conducted by home economists representing several commercial concerns proved very effective. A total of 49,350 leaflets, charts, and posters were distributed as part of a teaching unit in each school or school system, thereby helping to integrate nutrition information into the educational system.

THE HOME FRONT

With the coming of rationing, the problem of an adequate diet was greatly intensified. The Nutrition Council, through the radio, press, and other media of publicity has tried to help people adjust to the wartime civilian food supply by teaching them how to use the more abundant foods as alternates for foods which were rationed.

At one city school the Council has been conducting a special nutrition consultation service to help low-income families with their food problems.

The response to a single broadcast over a local radio station showed how keenly Cincinnatians were interested in solving their food problems.

To put across sound information in a personalized way, the Nutrition Council uses on occasions a device sponsored by all the Councils--a fictitious character called Grandma Wise. Of nutrition, Grandma Wise says: I figure the real purpose of food is to make health and strength, not fat. When a person starts gittin' too fat, it's time to quit overeating or see the doctor--maybe it's a good thing to do both. Through these sayings of Grandma Wise the Council can strike a homey note to quickly catch the public's attention.

Perhaps the most effective publication medium the Council uses is a little two-page folder called "The Family Cupboard." The content of this illustrated leaflet is directed primarily to low-income families. The material, on timely subjects, is prepared each month by different nutrition specialists who are members of the Nutrition Council. Between 7,000 and 8,000 copies are distributed each month to those who come to the various community clinics for advice.

To make certain that "The Family Cupboard" best served the needs of the low-income families to whom it was directed, a questionnaire was distributed to the agencies which receive the bulletin. The findings were afterward studied by the Evaluating Committee who recommended adapting the material towards lower income levels and including all phases of homemaking. Specific suggestions were that household hints be included on a seasonal basis, and that the folder include recipes for alternate foods and unrationed foods, and general information on foods currently available.

In answer to an increasing number of requests, the right food for elderly people was the theme of one issue of the Cupboard.

A Food Fights For Freedom Committee of the Council directed a campaign for the entire city. This campaign is expected to continue for the duration. Exhibits have been used in downtown store windows to emphasize the four-point program of Produce, Conserve, Share, and Play Square. Home Economics students at the University of Cincinnati designed and made 50 nutrition posters which were used as part of the store window exhibits, and displayed in hospitals and schools.

Trained nutritionists on the Council and volunteers have given short food talks to Parent-Teacher and other groups. About 8,000 copies of the "Pack a Punch in Every Lunch" pamphlet sponsored by the Nutrition Council, have been distributed by the Federation.

An excellent educational film, Modern Nutrition, was shown in the city for the first time under the sponsorship of the Council.

Recognizing the need for milk in an adequate diet, and appreciating that failure to use milk is often more a matter of economics than a lack of desire, the Council sent a letter to the Federal Office of Price Administration, urging that the ceiling price of milk be maintained at its present rate. Since the interest of the Council was based entirely upon the factor of good nutrition rather than profits from the sale of milk, the letter explained the need for milk in an adequate diet, and the effect that price has upon consumption.

The alarming number of complaints about flies, rats, dirt in stores, and eating establishments, and unsanitary dishwashing caused the Council to direct a communication to the Coordinating Committee suggesting that the problem should be discussed with the Cincinnati Department of Health.

A JOINT NUTRITION INSTITUTE

Aware that the area beyond the city limits of Cincinnati is by social influence a part of the Cincinnati community, the Nutrition Council, in co-operation with the State Nutrition Committee, sponsored a Joint Nutrition Institute with the five surrounding counties.

The day's program given by State, County, and local representatives, consisted of round-table discussions, talks, exhibits, and slides on community living for better nutrition. Particular emphasis was paid to the school lunch, meals set for the national nutrition program, methods whereby nutrition information could be made available to all groups, and ways of encouraging food production and preservation.

Special emphasis was also placed upon the use of radio, newspapers, and films as a means of reaching large numbers of people to promote better nutrition. The Council held its regular monthly meeting as a part of the institute, so that the persons attending could obtain a first-hand picture of the activities of the Cincinnati Council.

The institute afforded these leaders, assembled from the five counties surrounding Cincinnati, an excellent opportunity to exchange ideas on mutual problems. However, more important, the institute stimulated their appreciation of the fact that through coordinated team work they could reach their goals of better health through better nutrition for this larger Cincinnati community.